1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

Land Tenure

The rules governing land tenure were those which would be expected of a society which suffered from no land shortage. A man was entitled to as much land as he could cultivate, the limitation being that he should consult the headman as to his neighbours' boundaries. Abandoned gardens could only be taken up with the permission of the original cultivator.[1]

MAIN CULTURAL FEATURES

Religion

The Yao are largely Islamised. Codrington remarked that the perpetuation of this faith was distinctly antagonistic to British influence, and it received considerable attention from chiefs and headmen. Schools for the instruction of youth in reading and writing Swahili in Arabic characters were established in nearly every village, where also prayers were made at regular intervals in the day. The Moslem fasts and feasts were also observed, and the Yao were not inclined to embrace Christianity.[2] Their conversion to Islam did not take place till the nineteenth century, long after their first introduction to the Arab traders at Kilwa and Zanzibar, although they had adopted Swahili modes of dress much earlier.[3]

According to Hetherwick, Islam is strongest on the lake shore and on the east border of Nyasaland, chiefly round the old slave-trade centres. Makanjira's on the south-east side of the lake, and Domira Bay on the west, were the centres of Moslem propaganda. The Moslem population around Zomba and Blantyre consists mainly of Yao men, who have built themselves mosques in their own villages, or use the large mosques of Indian Moslem merchants. In the west districts, lower Shire, Ruo, central Shire, Lilongwe, Fort Manning, the Moslem population does not total more than 732. In the districts round Fort Johnston and Kotakota, the Moslems are one-ninth of the total population, while in Zomba district they number one-fifth.[4]

The Yao pagan religion was a form of ancestor worship. Apart from diviners and medicine men, there was no regular priestly profession. Intercession with the ancestors was performed by the chief, on behalf of the chiefdom, by the headman on behalf of the village, and by the head of the matrilineal kin for his dependents.[5] A man was qualified to approach his ancestors individually only if he had been initiated and had a house of his own.[6]

Some of the ritual duties of the chief have already been mentioned. When his people were visited by drought or epidemic, or when he fixed the day for the beginning of the millet harvest, he made an offering of flour and of beer poured into a pot in the ground at the grave of a dead chief. The village headman made similar offerings to the spirit of his dead predecessor. The spirits of the dead Nyanja chiefs, ousted by the Yao invasion, were regarded as still powerful in the homeland of their people. For instance, Kangomba, whose shrine was on Mount Soche, used to be appealed to for rain, and on the principle that the most appropriate mediator between a dead man and the living is a descendant of the former, the Yao chief, Kapeni, when he wished to propitiate

[1] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 177–9; Sumner, 2, 1923, p. 280.
[2] Codrington, 1896, p. 326; see also Maples, 3, 1893.
[3] Young, T. C., 4, 1932, p. 27.
[4] Hetherwick, 4, 1907, p. 127.
[5] Werner, 1906, p. 270; Sumner, 4, 1922, p. 311.
[6] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 63.

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1: Tew . E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

Kangombe, used to persuade Nyanja to help in the sacrificial rite. When Kapeni in turn fled to Mount Soche from the Ngoni, and died there, the Yao addressed their offerings to him, not to Kangomba.[1] The word *Mulungu* has sometimes been interpreted to mean Supreme Being, God, Creator, but among the Yao it seems not to have a personal connotation. It was used to describe the agent in any mysterious event,[2] or the place where the ancestor spirits (*masoka*) were supposed to dwell. Daily life was full of acts of respect towards the ancestors, who were regarded as jealous of the living, and requiring constant propitiation.[3]

Sorcery

Accusations of witchcraft and measures for dealing with it play a dominant role in Yao social life. With certain exceptions nearly all diseases and deaths are thought to be caused by sorcery. The exceptional causes are: the hand of God, old age, the transgression of certain taboos, and battle wounds. If sorcery is suspected the relatives of the sick or dead man consult the diviner to identify the offender.

Yao (in common with the Maravi and many peoples of Central Africa) believe that sorcerers have a craving for human flesh, which they satisfy by killing with magic the victims of their malice and hatred. They acquire their magical powers by an apprenticeship, which might include incestuous relations with mother, sister, or mother-in-law, or sleeping on the grave of the mother for one night. The sorcerer then learns the medicines and finally demonstrates his power by killing a young relative by magic; he waits till the victim is buried, and then magically exhumes him for the secret feast with his fellow sorcerers. Each sorcerer who shares the flesh owes a debt to the one who secured the victim.

Charms are used as preventive measures against sorcery. When a diviner has diagnosed the cause of death as sorcery, retaliatory measures are taken. The headmen of the village could either call in the witchfinder to identify the offender or he could call in the diviner to take action against all the sorcerers in the village. After the diviner, *Mabitalila*, had revealed the guilty ones, they were challenged to take the poison ordeal to prove their innocence. If they died, the proof and the punishment were simultaneously accomplished. If they survived, the diviner was held to have been at fault and they were acquitted. The witch doctor was supposed to entice sorcerers to the graveside, and slay them with magic more powerful than their own.

The diviner's findings are to-day checked by the poison ordeal administered to a chicken. A sorcerer detected in this way might be asked to provide medicine for the man whose sickness he had caused, or after a death he might be compelled to pay compensation. If the accused is a village headman, he will not be summoned before a chief, but his brother will take the villagers away from the sphere of his influence, or he may be chased away from the district. Accusations of sorcery follow certain regular lines. Nearly all accusations fall on relatives. Diviners are consulted by matrilineal relatives of the sick or dead person, and the man most usually accused is the brother of the accuser, or the husband of his sister. Witchcraft is therefore a manner of expressing the hostilities latent in these relations, which are, in the Yao social system, full of tension.

[1] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 70.
[2] Hetherwick, 3, 1902.
[3] Hechel, 1935, pp. 14–15; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 58–75, 204–13.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

631 advocates the more orthodox type of Islamic devotion in which
643 a quiet restrained manner is emphasized. As far as I know the
745 *twaliki* sect are confined entirely to Jalasi's chiefdom and the *sukutu* to Kawinga and Liwonde. In this matter, Nyambi's people side with Kawinga's and Liwonde's.

631 On the other hand, local informal organization is well de-
643 veloped so that Chiwalo who is at the point of juxtaposition of
692 Kawinga, Liwonde, Nyambi and Jalasi chiefdoms, may try cases involving headmen from any of these areas, and they usually accept his arbitration. His is the nearest court house. The actual boundaries of the four areas, however, are very clearly recognized and Chiwalo realizes the limits of his jurisdiction. Though he may arbitrate in a difference between headmen, he would not dare to apportion land outside his area. Headmen living on the boundaries of two chiefdoms arbitrate in each other's cases; the
621 villagers under them intermarry. A village in Chiwalo's may
631 procure garden lands in Jalasi's area, and children may be initiated
643 at ceremonies held by headmen in other chiefdoms. There is no clear break in the normal social relationships of people across the boundaries of chiefdoms, and their members interact as freely with each other as members of two villages of the same chiefdom. The cleavage between the villages on different sides of the boundary of a chiefdom becomes apparent only in special situations.

631 The formal relationships of the chiefs, set by the history of
643 their conquests and their kinship, and incorporated in and slightly modified by the Administrative framework, are overlaid by an informal local organization where the interaction of village headmen only conforms to the formal pattern when no agreement can be reached.

The Position of the Modern Chief

643 In ritual situations a chiefdom is clearly differentiated from its
769 neighbours, and many of these situations arise in the cult of
782 tendence on the ancestor spirits. The ancestor cult has fallen away almost completely among village headmen, but among the chiefs it is still strong, and appears particularly in the rain-prayers and the initiation ceremonies. Later, I shall discuss at length the importance of the chief's sanction before headmen may conduct initiation ceremonies. This is because the spirits

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

of the ancestors of the chief are supposed to affect the welfare of the initiands. Though some village headmen may conduct initiation ceremonies they are unable to offer rain-prayers. These are offered by a chief on two occasions. The first is in November, before the rains have started. The chief's wife and some women from the bigger villages in the near vicinity of the chief's village gather at his hut. They brew beer—*ukana wacisoka*, the beer of the spirits—to be used as a libation. At sunset on the appointed day the chief goes to the shrine tree where some headmen have gathered, and pours some of the beer into a pot, partly buried at the root of the tree, while he invokes all the spirits of his departed ancestors—mainly matrilineal but occasionally some patrilateral. He then entreats the spirits to send some rain and to look after their 'children' in the land. Sometimes a length of calico is hung on the tree as an extra offering. Should no rain fall the chief will have to repeat the offering until it does fall. When the rains have ended in March he makes a second offering 'of thanks'.

In the context of the present discussion, the important point is that it is only the chief who can make this libation and offer this prayer. If his plea fails the whole area starves, and no headman may supplicate his ancestors on his own behalf or approach the chief's ancestors through his own ancestors. The grain for the beer comes from the various villages, but not on a fixed rate of levy. Some villages never contribute. The chief buys the offered cloth on behalf of his people. When in 1948 the cloth on the shrine tree was stolen, Chiwalo imposed a levy on the village headmen in the area so that a new cloth could be bought. Here the boundaries of the chiefdoms are important, and no headman outside Chiwalo's area was approached. A village headman from Jalasi's area, though geographically much closer to Chiwalo, relies on Jalasi's rain-offerings and may not approach Chiwalo or plead with him to offer a rain-prayer to his ancestors.

Another ritual situation in which the limits of the chiefdom appear is during the institutionalized pillage on the death of a chief. I have not been in any area when the chief has died, so that I rely here on the tales of informants. During the mourning rites certain feasts are held. The food for the mourning feast of a commoner or village headman is provided from his estate

3:Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Tao FT7

as to procuring medicine for him from a medicine-man. If the caster of lots is suspicious that some one has caused the illness, he will at the same time add, "Let us and so pray," mentioning the name of the man whom he suspects. Following the advice given, the medicine-man is consulted. He promises to get medicine for the sick man and goes into the forest to search for it. Having returned, he prepares his decoctions and having first partaken of a little himself, he gives it to his patient with further instructions. The friends of the sick man having returned to the village, indirectly ask the man on whom suspicion has been cast to pray for the sick man saying, "He is covered by some spirit." The man prays, sometimes using *nkupani* and beginning *chondo! chondo!* "please! please!" and goes on to ask *Mlungu* to take away the spirit which has covered the sick man, adding that he himself is innocent of any ill doing against the man and that any grudge he may have had against him is now forgotten.

If the sick man recovers, well and good, but should he die, there is more to be done. The morning following the burial, the relatives go to the *chief* and in answer to his inquiry of what they are going to do, they say they must again consult the caster-of-lots. They will choose some one who lives a long way off and is not cognisant of the death of their relative: those who go to him have not been shaved after the funeral. Much the same business is gone through as on the first occasion but, in the end, the caster-of-lots is told that they suspect some one unknown to have brought about the death of their relative. The names of all the possible persons are given, the lots cast in each case and, eventually, one is picked out as the guilty man; the caster-of-lots saying, "If I am not telling the truth, you can test my words by giving *muavi* (ordeal poison) to a fowl; if it does not die, come back and break up all my properties."

He may have gained information from his lots that the suspect is a man of power gained by some special rite, e.g. the midnight bath on the ant hill, in which case he will insist that the fowl poison-ordeal must take place on an ant hill *or* he will give other specific instructions. On the way back, the relatives will buy two fowls; *muavi* will be prepared by a boy who has not passed through his initiation ceremonies, and two of the party will be chosen as pleaders, one for the deceased, the other for the accused. One fowl is then selected to represent the accused and the poison administered according to the conditions laid down by the lot-thrower, while the two pleaders give injunctions to it, one saying, "You are guilty; you shall die"; the other, "You are innocent and you shall show your innocence by vomiting the poison and recovering." If the fowl dies, a third man cuts off its head, saying, "I am the buryer of the dead." *Muavi* is then administered to the second fowl to ascertain whether any other persons are involved. The head of the first fowl is singed, stuck on a stick and carried back with the party towards their village. A little way outside, they halt in the bush, and send word to the headman that they are returning. He then comes out privately to see them, asking what has happened, and is told all the events in sequence.

3: Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

knees and elbows, at intervals swaying their bodies from side to side and clapping their hands. Kasanga then ordered all to go and bathe, men and women separately. As they returned from the stream, rain began to fall.

Intercession on behalf of the sick may be made, especially by anyone who is likely to be accused of causing the illness by witchcraft.[1] The man standing with arms outstretched, downwards and a little in front of his body, the hands supine, takes some water in his mouth and discharges it in a stream on the ground, (probably as a sign of purification of his tongue), and then invoking "all the spirits above," asks that they will intercede to restore health to the sick man and bear witness to his own innocence of any wish to do the sick man injury. *Ku-pepa* is the word meaning to offer sacrifice and prayer.

Harvesting and hunting are occasions when sacrifices may be offered. It was formerly the custom for the chief to determine the day on which harvesting of millet should begin. On the day appointed, a big drum was beaten in the village and word passed round; then everyone would go down to his garden, gather a head of millet, and bring it back to the village where it was all handed over to the chief's headwife. After drying and threshing, a little of the grain was laid at the grave of an old chief by one of the reigning chief's advisers, the remainder being again distributed to all the people gathered together in the village meeting-place, who ate it raw. After this ceremony, harvesting began.

In passing through a millet garden, if a child asks his mother to give him some to eat, she plucks a bunch or two and reverently laying one at the foot of a *msoro* tree for the spirits or at the base of some other tree, if she cannot see a *msoro*, she gives the rest to the child.

When a hunting expedition makes its first killing, part of the flesh of the animal is laid at the base of a tree as a thank offering to the spirits and in anticipation of further favors to be conferred. All such offerings are supposed by the natives to be partaken of by the spirits, though they are well aware that they do not actually diminish in quantity. There is an interesting point in this connection: any man who has acted as *mbilo* (undertaker) to some well-known man may appropriate these offerings. In the case of the hunting offering, he will run round the tree, saying, "I am a hyaena, the spirits will not mind me," and will then take part of the flesh-offering and eat it.

In the same way, a *mbilo* may drink from a grave beer-pot after three days, when the spirits are supposed to have taken what they want.

With the exception of the *msoro* tree above mentioned (*ndima*, Chin.), and possibly another called *mulo-ngumu* (Chin.), which is never used as firewood and which is supposed to be used by *mzimu*, I do not think there are any sacred trees properly so-called. Miss Werner supposes that many of the big trees (often a species of *Ficus*) in villages are sacred.[2] The truth is, I believe, simply that a village is made naturally round a big tree which conveniently offers its shade for the village meeting place. The spirits of deceased chiefs may

[1] Vide supra, p. 297.

[2] The natives of British Central Africa, op. cit., p. 62.

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

Unkulunkulu, which may therefore be rendered as "The old, old One," or "The great, great One." A like rendering may be given of the Yao form *mulungu*, the "Old One," or the "Great One." In this or a modified form *muungu* (Swahili) it appears in all the Eastern group of the Bantu tongues as the equivalent for "God" (see Father Torrend's *Comparative Grammar of South African Bantu Languages*). To trace it as Father Torrend does to any connection with Moloch, the god of the Phœnicians, is to attach undue weight to a chance coincidence of sounds.

As we have already seen, the word *mulungu* is applied to the human *lisoka* when regarded as an object of worship, or as an inhabitant of the spirit world. But it is also used to denote that spirit world in general, or more properly speaking, the *aggregate of the spirits of all the dead*. The plural form of the word is rarely heard, unless when the allusion is made to the souls in their individualities. In its native use and form the word does not imply personality, for it does not belong to the personal class of nouns. Etymologically it is classed with the leg, heart, arm, head, etc., of the human frame. Its form denotes rather a state or property inhering in something, as the life or health inheres in the body. Among the various tribes where the word is in use as we have described, the missionaries have adopted it as the term for "God." But the untaught Yao refuses to assign to it any idea of being or personality. It is to him more a quality or faculty of the human nature whose signification he has extended so as to embrace the whole spirit world. Once after I had endeavoured to impress an old Yao headman with the personality of the Godhead in the Christian sense of the term, using the term *Mulungu*, my listener began to talk of "Che Mulungu," "Mr. God," showing that originally to him the word conveyed no idea of the personality I was ascribing to it.

And yet the Yao approaches closely to the idea of personality and a personal being, when he speaks of what *mulungu* has done and is doing. It is *mulungu* who made the world, and man, and animals. Far in the interior of the continent, toward the north-west, beyond the plains and swamps of the Loangwa River and Lake Bangweolo, there lies, in Yao legend, an island in the midst of a lake called Kapiritimya. On that island there is to be seen a large flat rock marked by the footprints of men and animals of all kinds. When that rock was once a heap of moist clay, *mulungu* created all living things and sent them across the soft mass, where their footprints remained to be afterwards hardened into the imperishable rock. Such is the Yao legend of the creation of the world, and *mulungu* is always the Great Creator.

Mulungu is also regarded as the agent in anything mysterious. "It's *mulungu*," is the Yao exclamation on being shown anything that is beyond the range of his understanding. The rainbow is always "*mulungu*," although some Yaos have begun to use the Mang'anja term "uta wa Leza," bow of Leza.

Offerings are made to the spirit world or to *mulungu* as the great agency in the affairs of human life. Outside the village, or beside the headman's hut, may often be seen a rough shed. In this are placed the first-fruits of the new crop,

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

green maize, beans, pumpkins, peas, etc., as a thankoffering from the villagers for their harvest. This is described as *kulomba mulungu*, to worship *mulungu*. At the foot of the tree in the village courtyard, where the men sit and talk or work, an occasional small offering of flour or beer is placed on any special occasion in the life of the village or any of its inhabitants. This also is *kulomba mulungu*. A devout native sitting down to a meal will, before beginning to eat, take out a small morsel of the food before him and throw it at the root of the nearest tree as an offering to *mulungu*. On a journey a traveller will sometimes stop and lay a little flour in a pyramidal heap at the foot of a tree by the wayside or at an angle where two roads meet. This, like the others, is for *mulungu*, the spirit world, the guardian of the wayfarer on his journey.

Thus the Yao presents us with three stages of animistic belief:—

(1) The human *liwalo* or shade, the agent in dreams, delirium, etc.

(2) This *liwalo* regarded as *mulungu*, and an object of worship and reverence, the controller of the affairs of this life, the active agent in the fortunes of the human race.

(3) And lastly, *mulungu* as expressing the great spirit agency, the creator of the world and all life, the source of all things animate and inanimate.

And yet between these three conceptions of the spirit nature no definite boundary line can be drawn. The distinction in the native mind is ever of the haziest. No one will give you a dogmatic statement of his belief on such points.

It is only through long association with them in their daily life noting actual expressions of opinion or hearing of definite acts in relation to their worship or their dead, that one can get behind the reserve with which every Yao man or woman approaches or alludes to the spirit world which lies beyond and after this.

II. The Political Structure
BEFORE THE WHITES CAME

173 643 167 (*kuhamula ukongolo*), i.e. to surrender to the chief in the area. Also the chief sent out expeditions to capture slaves or he purchased slaves with the cloth and beads he had exchanged for ivory at the East coast.

643 421 Within his territory certain privileges and rights were held by the chief and he had certain religious duties to perform in which the unity of the people in the territory was expressed. In general the chief had rights over any ivory either found or hunted in his territory. If a dead elephant were found the tusks belonged to the chief, though he usually rewarded the finder with cloth. If a man killed an elephant the tusk that lay on [224] the ground belonged to the chief while the other belonged to the killer. The killer's tusk was in- [439] cluded in the chief's caravan to the coast and its value paid in cloth to the killer when the caravan returned.

643 651 The chief was also entitled to an annual tribute of food and beer from all villages in his area, but this was used to entertain visitors who came to the court-village.

643 782 The chief's religious duties lay mainly in propitiating the spirits of his ancestors on occasions when the community at large, in contrast to the chief's own private affairs, was either threatened or directly affected. The most obvious occasion was immediately before the rains came when flour was poured on the tree shrine and the spirits of the ancestors asked for good rains. Later when the rains were over a similar sacrifice was made asking for a good harvest. Sacrifices to the ancestors were also made on two other public occasions. They were made when some calamity had occurred or was believed to be impending. A run of unsuccessful campaigns induced Cingwalugwalu, a son of the Yao chief Mponda near Fort Johnston, to ask his father's father's brother to make sacri-

643 782 fice to the ancestors. The other public occasion was at initiation ceremonies. A successful initiation, i.e. one in which the initiates were not beset by misfortune, depended upon the goodwill of the ancestors of the chief. Initiates therefore gathered at the chief's court-village before the initiation, when the sanction of the spirits was asked and the initiates severally blessed. After this they scattered to the bush-schools near their villages only to return when initiation was completed and the chief received them into tribal society.

643 769 The people who had submitted themselves, willingly or unwillingly, to the rule of a chief, in turn expected certain services from him. He provided them, as we saw, with mystical protection through his ancestors. On a more pragmatic plane he was able to arm and co-ordinate military forces thereby giving his people protection from attack. Within his area of rule he was a common person of final appeal in the regulation of relationships of his subjects.

In these various ways, by propitiating his ancestor's spirits on behalf of his subjects, by settling differences between subjects, by co-ordinating defence and in fact by being a unique personality in the area, the chief became the symbol of unity of his tribal group. The symbolism was clearly noticeable on the death of a chief when a short period of social disorganization called *cipinimbe* followed. The members of the chief's village were allowed to pillage and to commit rape and other criminal acts without suffering legal action. The demise of the symbol of unity was followed by a period of disunity before the appointment of successor restored the *status quo*.

622 [769] At the same time much of what has been said about the chief was true also of important village headmen. Village headmen also made sacrifices to their ancestors but only in domestic or village affairs. They too built up their prestige by slaving. Many villages in Southern Nyasaland to-day

11: Sanderson D-5 (ca. 1920) 1920 FT7 Yao FT7

The alternative term, *wese*, common to nearly all Bantu languages, is usually reserved for "own father," but not always. 601

Latterly, though the relationship is really *akweyo*, the husbands of a man's "daughters" or "grand-daughters" are called *atati* -in a complimentary sense, not of course in defining relationship.

The word *akweyo* is rapidly falling into desuetude for men, and is, nowadays, never used in speaking to a man of that relationship, though used freely as a mode of address to women.

Amao (or *achikulu-wangu*, *-wao*, etc., "my, his mother") may be further defined as "great" or "little" in the same manner as *atati*.

The parents of any *atati* or *amao*, and those of one's wife are called *ambuje* ("grandparent"). Great-grandparents are specified as "father" or "mother of my grandfather (or mother)."

The founder of a family is called *Likolo*, especially in prayer—except for the augmentative prefix obviously the same word as *Nanyolo*, "a parent," which includes all "fathers" and "mothers." [782]

It is curious in this connection that a name for little girls in general, if one does not know their real name, is *chikolo*. All these words seem to be derived from *-kola* ("have," "possess"), and refer, probably, either to actual or potential possession of offspring.

Achinangolo are distinguished as "male" or "female" according as they belong to the father's or mother's side—irrespective of their own sex.

Conclusions.—The Yao nomenclature of relationships, bearing as it does the evidence of former group marriages, is, like other classificatory systems, gradually changing in conformity with the development of the race, so that it can be used to express consanguinity; Rivers has, I believe, called attention to this process. 601 198 [12]

The Yao custom—now dying out—of lending one's wife to a visitor (usually a close friend) may be a remnant of ideas carried on from communal marriage, though such a privilege is never given to a relative. [839] [504]

In the same way a man who has had no children (a great stigma) may request his friend to help him - he will never ask a relative - and all of the three parties will keep the secret of the true paternity of any children resulting. [839] [840]

In many tribes the marriage of brother and sister, or a man with his sister's child, is permitted to compensate for the law by which a man's property goes to the son of a stranger, but nothing of the kind is allowed among the Yaos. Indeed, they view any incestuous union with particular horror, and such must be very rare. I have heard of a case of a man committing incest with the idea that he would thereby become endued with supernatural power, but all he gained was ostracism; in the old days he would have been burned. 588 835 [20]